Discussion

> "Yo creo que la transexualidad es un poco también un calco de la heterosexualidad." *(Tamara, 2003)*[1]

Over the last decades, Spanish society has experienced fundamental transformations. The end of the *franquismo* era facilitated Spain's integration into the European Community, thus, tightening up the connections between the Peninsula and the rest of Europe. Significant transformations have also occurred in dealing with sexuality and gender. Being part of the European Union with its liberal and neoliberal obligations regarding gender equity and its emphasis on individual rights, self-responsibility and productivity, the notions of sex and gender for 'Mediterranean' Societies as depicted by North American and North Western European social anthropologists in the second half of the 20th century, which rigorously sexualised men and women in different ways, and which took heterosexuality as the natural form of relationship (see Introduction) are definitely antiquated. The 'public' or *la calle* (the street) is no longer a space exclusively for men, whereas the 'private' (e.g. the household) might still be more closely connected to women's duties. However, in conjunction with the sex and gender images depicted by the romantic travellers in the 19th century (see Introduction as well), Mozo and Tena (2003) indicate that earlier descriptions of Andalusian men and women served in many respects as 'natural' markers of Andalusian society that have left traces until today.

Some of these traces may be responsible for the fact that the 'not yet natural' achievements of contemporary society have to be constantly fought for, as the recent International Women's day in Spain showed. According to press releases, many women in Spain mobilised on March 8th, 2019 (International Women's day), especially in Madrid and Barcelona. The participants expressed their fear of a shift towards the right in the upcoming elections. They were worried that achievements regarding sex and gender (e.g. the right for abortion) would be reversed if a right wing and conservative government were in charge, thus, throwing Spain back to where it was in the 1980s. (The intention to restrict abortion and abolish gay marriage was already planned by Mariano Rajoy's conservative government in 2013, but

1 "I think that transsexuality is also a little bit a copy of heterosexuality." (Tamara, 2003)

nationwide protests prevented this). These contemporary discourses point, once more, to vulnerability regarding achieving and protecting sex and gender rights over the last four decades. This is even more so for sex and gender non-conforming people.

Regarding the 'transsexual phenomenon' in Andalusia, the insights into the life worlds of my research partners allow the transformations that have occurred over the last decades to be reconstructed. On the one hand, these insights are based on the memories and told experiences of my interlocutors. On the other hand, they are based on observations and findings during my two periods of field research that spanned over a decade, and turned out to be a timespan in which significant legal changes were witnessed.

Transformation processes include the terminological shift from 'homosexual' to 'transsexual', the legal shift from illegality to legality, the medical shift from self-medication to medical supervision, in sum, the shift from non-recognition to recognition to legal recognition. Recent laws facilitate the change of identity documents. For instance, genital surgery, a hysterectomy (i.e. castration/sterilisation), or the obligation to divorce (if married) are no longer preconditions for document change. The elderly among my research participants remember that in earlier years, society in general (and especially the authorities, e.g., the police) did not distinguish between homosexual and transsexual persons. Thus, it can be argued that the path to visibility in Spain has opened only since the end of the 1970s, when homosexuality was decriminalised. However, for many more years, information about transsexuality was scarce. Thus, the middle aged and even the younger among my informants only learned about the term, transsexuality, by detours. (From then on, the term served to explain their gender non-conforming feelings). Information flow was informal, self-medication with hormones popular, and access to medical assistance costly, which led some of my informants to earn their money in sex work (not least to be able to afford breast implants, for example). The integration of medical support for sex/gender transition in the public health system in Andalusia in 1999 (as the first autonomous community in Spain and for which a group of trans persons had strongly advocated) facilitated, on the one hand, access to sex/gender transition, especially for those with limited economic resources who could not afford to have it done in a private clinic. On the other hand, some of my informants remarked that they were told under no uncertain terms what they had to do. Thus, this shift seemed also to strengthen the control of medicine over the body of the trans person. This control has been challenged by part of the trans community over the last years, by demanding both a decentralisation of the medical attendance of trans persons, and the right for self-determination of their gender identity. On the macro-level, there seems to be a discrepancy between the more structured and available medical support, and the increased call for self-determination, which challenges the former.

In Andalusia, female-to-male trans persons also gained in terms of visibility. Earlier discussions about transsexuality and transgender had focussed mainly on male-to-female trans persons, and trans men had stayed in the background. During my first field research trip in 2003, it was difficult to contact trans men. They existed, but only one was prepared to meet me: Ronaldo, who had experience in talking about his situation and considered it important that FtMs are heard. This was different when I reentered the field ten years later. Suddenly, I encountered young trans men who were interested in sharing their stories. Another sign of their increased visibility could be seen based on the annual calendar that the *Asociación de Transexuales de Andalucía Sylvia Rivera* (ATA) created for the year 2013. The calendar portrays twelve local trans men, one for each month. The FtMs pose in masculine attributed positions, some half-naked, showing off their athletic bodies, their chest hairs, or presenting themselves in casual, relaxed postures. Each picture is accompanied by a saying that addresses self-esteem, the possibilities of transformation and the potential for the fulfillment of dreams.

Transformation processes also occurred on the individual level among my research partners. Four of my research partners had completed their sex/gender transition by having undergone genital surgery. Additionally, those who never aspired for sex/gender affirmation surgery (especially genital surgery) had been able to change their identity documents in the meantime.

When I first entered the field in 2003 to do research among trans people in Andalusia, a local friend recommended that I should not disclose to uninvolved people the real reason for my research. Rather, I should offer a more general explanation, for example, I should tell them I was researching gender roles. His advice made me realise that my research topic might be met with incomprehension or might even provoke rejection by the locals, who had never had anything to do with this subject (which could apply to the majority of the general population). Thus, it seemed to be a kind of taboo. When I resumed my fieldwork in 2013, I no longer felt the need to 'mask' my research or spare uninvolved people my real research purpose when asked about my doings. On the one hand, this had to do with a transformation in my own personal attitude (why would I spare the ignorant?). On the other hand, it was related to the above-mentioned transformation processes, which suggest an increased societal awareness of the topic. Thus, when in Seville during the *Semana Trans Cultural* (see Chapter 6), I was asked by a local why I had come to Seville that week. We had met in a different context, and I knew that he favoured the *Partido Popular* politically, and that he was an advocate of the monarchy. I disclosed my research interest and told him of the ongoing trans week in his city. He did not show any signs of rejection. On the contrary, he demonstrated interest, although he had not heard about the week.

Nevertheless, the question remains: has more information about the needs of and demands from trans persons in Andalusian society really led to more accep-

tance in the general population, or is a 'disciplining' (or hiding, in the sense of political correctness) taking place? People in Andalusia are usually pretty noisy and I experienced some individuals as outspoken when it came to commenting on a person's appearance or non-normative behaviour. One of my research partners indicated that she does not know if it is actually tolerance or if people are "false" (in the sense that they just do not express their opinion openly, which might be related to anti-discrimination obligations).

Research done by anthropologists in the second half of the 20th century and their analyses of men and women depicted Andalusia as traditional and backward, and served to draw a line between a 'traditional' South and a 'modern' North (see Introduction). Although this attribution has been refuted in the meantime, it has, nevertheless, left its traces. Imelda, judging the situation for trans people in Andalusia to be worse than in northern countries, also drew a picture of a more developed North compared to the South (see Chapter 4.5). Additionally, Magdalena, upon my inquiry why it was Andalusia and not, for example, Catalonia to be the first autonomous community to expand public health to the treatment of trans people, insinuated that I considered Catalonia more advanced than Andalusia, thus, indicating that she is well aware of this North-South perception (see Chapter 1.3). Thus, the transformation process of a region formerly depicted as 'closed to sexual plurality, where the heterosexist order and homophobia is always present' (see Introduction) to a region with a progressive *Ley Integral de Transexualidad* that will situate Andalusia 'at the forefront of Spain, Europe and the World', as the ATA claims (see Chapter 6), is really noteworthy.

In sum, during my two field research periods, significant transformations have taken place, both on the societal level in general and on the personal level of my research partners. The change of identity documents has been facilitated, the needs of trans persons have been increasingly articulated (especially due to the foundation and active role of the ATA), FtM trans persons have come out of the closet in greater numbers and the practice of medical attendance (especially the central role of the UTIG with its protocol for diagnosis) has been placed under closer scrutiny by part of the trans community. Furthermore, the role of education has been addressed, familial ties seem to be providing more understanding, and how minor trans persons are dealt with has also become a topic. And last but not least, individual aims concerning surgery have been achieved. All of my research partners who longed for genital surgery have been operated on in the meantime. Yet, why did I have the feeling that despite these positive transformations, not much had changed? Obvious facts (significant improvements) contradicted my sense that everyday life goes on as it always has, a contradiction I had difficulties grasping.

To approach this contradiction, reflecting about the simultaneity of change and persistence might be promising. Maihofer notes that " […] die Neigung, von *einer Gleichzeitigkeit von gesellschaftlichem Wandel und Kontinuität/Persistenz* zu spre-

chen, […] ein allgemeines Phänomen historischer Umbruchphasen ist, in der sich Altes, Neues, und Zukünftiges noch unentschieden und uneindeutig auf komplexe Weise mischen" (2007: 297-298).[2] This entails the simultaneity of opportunities and constraints, as well as of empowerment and uncertainty. Thus, an increasing pluralisation goes hand-in-hand with growing uncertainty, and is no longer merely perceived as an extension of the individual way of living. This, in turn, leads to a paradox of change and persistence (Maihofer 2007). Furthermore, there are some indications emerging from my data that hint at the perseverance of internalised societal structures, despite the above-mentioned transformations and that have to do with diverging temporalities.

Some of my interlocutors addressed the diverging pace between the current legal situation and the consciousness of the general population, that is, that the latter is lagging behind. Anabel states she has reached her goals concerning gender transition, and that she is now waiting for society to catch up:

> "No espero nada nuevo en verdad. Más que avance que la sociedad cambie. Es lo que faltaría. Eso sí es verdad. Que es lo que falta por cambiar la sociedad, no yo. Yo ya he cambiado." (Anabel, 2013)[3]

She does not think that the mentality of the people or, specifically, their attitude towards sex/gender non-normative behaviour have actually changed:

> "Pero en verdad creo que en el fondo la sociedad es igual de … de intransigente con este tipo de tema, igual que hace diez años. Sea a las leyes las puedes cambiar, tú puedes cambiar leyes más permisivas que pueden fomentar un poco la gente eso de que esto hay que respectarlo. ¿Vale? De que la gente entre ella se diga 'es que esto hay que respectarlo esto'. ¿Vale? Pero en el fondo … en el fondo, siguen pensando igual del … de la persona que es homosexual, de su clase o de su calle o de su trabajo. Eso es lo que yo quiero decir. Pienso el cambio va mucho más despacio que las leyes. Mucho (emphasised) más despacio." (Anabel, 2013)[4]

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2 "[…] the tendency to speak of a simultaneity of social change and continuity/persistence is a general phenomenon of historical upheaval, in which the old, the new, and the future still mix undecidedly and ambiguously in a complex way [own transl.]" (Maihofer 2007: 297-298).

3 "I don't expect anything new, really. Rather than advance, let society change. That's what's missing. That's what's true. What is missing is the societal change, not me. I've already changed." (Anabel, 2013)

4 "But really, I think that in the end, society is just as relentless with this kind of subject as ten years ago. The laws, you can change, you can make them more permissive to encourage people a bit to realise that they have to respect this. Right? That people say 'this, one has to respect'. Right? But in the end … in the end they keep thinking the same as always about a homosexual person, about their way of life, their doings. That's what I try to say. I think that the change is much slower than the laws. Much slower." (Anabel, 2013)

For Diego, too, the current legislation is an advance for trans individuals, but is not congruent with the social stance, because *"la ley ha ido antes que la sociedad"* ("the law has gone before society"):

> "Eso la sociedad todavía no lo entiende. Para la mayoría de la sociedad, tú eres un hombre cuando tengas un pene. Si lo tienes … más grande más hombre eres (laughter). Es igual que las mujeres. Cuando más tetas más mujer eres. ¿Sabes? Sí. Entonces eh por eso va un poquito la la ley un poquito más avanzada." (Diego, 2015)[5]

With regard to his hint at the societal significance given to breast size as a marker of femininity, *"Cuando más tetas más mujer eres"* ("The more tits, the more woman you are") he, nevertheless, notes a change of attitude in the younger generation of trans women. This generation no longer celebrates the 'hyper femininity' that could be observed in some individuals of the earlier generation. My data suggest that this change in attitude is related less to the age of the trans individuals, but rather to our contemporary time, where there is more information available, and where the goals and possibilities of how to earn a living are no longer restricted to sex work.

A further component that persists (and which is related to the above-mentioned societal perseverance) is the apparent impossibility to escape the sex/gender binarity in daily life, however open-minded and reflective my research partners are about sex-, gender- and desire-diversity. My interlocutors reflect the heterogeneity of the 'trans community'. Age differences, having started transition during the dictatorship or starting transition today, the direction of sex/gender reassignment (male-to-female, female-to-male), differences in social status, different ways to earn a living, and different demands concerning medical support (from hormonal treatment to genital surgery) have influenced their experiences and interactions within their social environment disparately. However, all of them shared a similar goal: that is to live a 'normal' life in the opposite sex than that assigned to them at birth, and to be respected. "*¡Y que me respeten!*" ("And that they respect me") Yolanda wishes, while reflecting upon negative experiences with people in the street. The promise of respect is closely linked to fitting into one of the two sexes society is accustomed to. It was striking to note either the essentialising of being trans among some of my informants (a condition explained by the gap between fetal development and neurological information) as well as the weight given to appearance (that is, the importance of presenting themselves in as clear a gender role as possible).

5 "This is what society still does not understand. For the majority, you are a man when you have a penis. If you have it … the bigger, the more man you are. It's the same as with the women. The more tits, the more woman you are. You know? Yes. So, in this regard, the law is a little bit more advanced." (Diego, 2015)

(Among my informants, a sex/gender-ambiguity in appearance was mostly perceived as the main obstacle for unchallenged movement in public). Both aspects (essentialising and appearance) are strongly related to notions of normality and respect. The explanatory model of essentialising 'proves' that being trans is a serious, physical/mental condition (thus, it must be addressed as such), and has nothing to do with moodiness. In addition, a suitable appearance allows trans individuals to move about in public as freely as possible (even sometimes to attract admiration).

Thus, to be accepted and respected without reproach by family, friends and society is of major concern among my research partners. This raises questions of inclusion and exclusion, which concern every aspect of life, be it from public areas, like access to employment, to private areas, like intimacy. Hence, when one of my interlocutors, Ramira, states that the people in her neighbourhood accept her, but adds: *"Y si no lo aceptan me da igual. ¡Oh me da igual!" (Ramira, 2015)* ("And if they don't accept it, I don't care. Oh, I really don't care"), I do not completely believe her. Ramira has gained cultural capital, not least due to her artistic folkloric skills, her upholding of traditions (for example, singing flamenco and coplas, participating in the pilgrimage of *El Rocío*), and her rootedness in her neighbourhood (see Chapter 4.5). She has surely gained on resilience (or serenity) with regard to eventual annoying encounters. However, I consider her expressed 'indifference' to be rather a coping strategy she has learned in the course of her life to endure all the hardships she must have encountered. All the photos she showed me, portraying her as a young and beautiful woman reflected her aspirations and pride in having succeeded to pass as and be respected in the female gender.

Two obvious and often-mentioned issues that are perceived as reflecting the level of acceptance are, on the one hand, the handling of language by the counterpart (the use of the 'correct' personal pronoun or form of address), and, on the other hand, the difficulties stemming from the data on official documents, like identity card (name and sex). Regarding the handling of language, some of my research partners were very sensitive about the way they were addressed. An early anecdote with one of my interlocutors might serve as an example. We were spending time in a restaurant in a park in town and Anabel went to the bar to get two beverages. Coming back with the drinks, she stated that the barman had just cheated himself out of a tip from her, because, when he delivered the beverages, he said: *"¡Toma, caballero!"* ("Here you go, sir"). She just replied *"¿Caballero?"*, which he answered with silence. Seeing the impact this short interaction at the bar had on her, and how sensitively she responded to being addressed this way (by taking the term *caballero* literally), had a self-sensitising effect on me as well.

Regarding the adjustment of identity documents, this was facilitated during my research periods. However, legal and medical barriers which still remained were bothering some of the trans persons I met (especially the obligatory medical certificate). However, without exception, they felt proud, less discriminated against,

and more comfortable once this administrative process had been successfully completed. For some of my informants (even more so for the female-to-male research partners) this allowed them to hide their transsexual career and, thus, protected them from expected discrimination:

> "En el momento que yo cambié mi nombre y mi sexo en el DNI [Documento Nacional de Identidad], nadie lo sabe. Si nadie lo sabe, no me discrimina. En el momen- de hecho yo no lo cuento porque sé que me pueden discriminar." (Diego, 2015)[6]

This statement also reflects the fact that earlier experiences of perceived discrimination (in the case of Diego, see the beginning of Chapter 5) influence one's readiness for disclosure in the future. Diego has no wish to disclose his trans career, because he still expects discrimination, thus, provoking feelings of exclusion, and (in the broadest sense) challenging his 'male citizenship'. Diego keeps his 'intimacy' private. Thus, to be accepted and respected, the overarching precondition (based on experiences) continues to be that the representation and performance of sex and gender are a successful match (cf. Hagemann-White 1988), independent of the extent of surgical interventions. Living a 'gender fluidity', that is, the notion that sex and gender is neither necessarily naturally preconditioned and fixed over the lifespan, nor necessarily binary, as discussed in queer theory and gender studies, seems still to be met with too many societal obstacles. Thus, the progress and achievements trans people in Andalusia have gained over the last two decades, are mainly in facilitating the regulatory obstacles that endangered a successful performance of a 'congruent' sex/gender. These are important achievements. Moreover, the call for self-determination and decentralised medical attendance is helpful for some individuals in their everyday life. Others feel insecure about fewer regulations concerning medical clarifications and fear a decrease in the quality of medical attendance due to a decentralisation. Still others criticise the fact that modifications to identity documents might be done too early (that is, not yet congruent with appearance). However, these entire discussions circle within a sex/gender binary societal order, thus, (although different, and more individualised, more public and more in agreement with human rights) do not disrupt the reproduction of this order.

It can be observed that the major achievements the trans community in Andalusia have gained over the last two decades, were (and still are) achieved thanks to the enormous efforts by single individuals. That is, the trans associations in Andalusia have become highly personalised. This was already the case in the 1990s, when Kim

6 "The moment I changed my name and my sex on the identity card, nobody knows. If no one knows, they won't discriminate against me. In fact, I don't tell, because I know that they can discriminate against me." (Diego, 2015)

Perez played an outstanding role in succeeding to integrate the medical attendance of trans people into the public health system, which finally led to the foundation of the UTIG. The later achievements were gained mainly through the insistence of the ATA, which, in turn, has been strongly shaped by their president. As I was told, this contrasts with the situation in cities like Madrid or Barcelona, especially because the trans collectives in these metropolises are much larger. Furthermore, as my data reveals, although the ATA is generally much appreciated among my research partners for its commitment and physical presence (that is, for the possibilities to meet in person), the ATA does not represent the entire trans community. There exist personal tensions, which have led some of my informants to feel less committed to the ATA. One may ask if the ATA is sustainable enough to maintain its role for the trans community in the future (which would require it to be able to integrate the divergent opinions of the local trans persons), or if the association will stand or fall with person-relatedness.

Most of my research partners radiated self-confidence, were straightforward, and had agency at their disposal. The fact that I got to know and obtained information from just these research partners, was strongly related to their current life situations, which influenced their readiness to enter into contact with me and tell me their story. That is, most of my interlocutors were either consolidated in the opposite sex/gender (having lived it for decades), or at least consolidated in their aim for sex/gender transition. Thus, reaching those who still might feel much more insecure and maybe unpractised talking about their situation is a further challenge. The case of Lora might serve as an example.

I met Lora during my second field research trip. She told me that if I had asked her ten years ago for a conversation like the one we were having then, she would have said 'no'. She would have been too shy and too insecure to talk to me about her situation. Now, speaking to me was like an exercise for her (one she had never done before), and she was proud of herself that she now had the courage and the self-esteem to do so. Another example is that of Rubina, who came from Madrid to Seville for the *Semana Trans Cultural*, using this event to publicly come out as a woman for the first time. Initially, she turned down my request for an interview, using the excuse that she was not from Andalusia. I did not insist. However, meeting her here and there during the week, engaging in and listening to informal conversations she had with friends or with me, was a way to get to know her situation. This would not have been possible otherwise.

This research is immersed in the lifeworlds of trans individuals in Andalusia, Southern Spain, a part of Europe not primarily associated with trans issues when discussed on a European or global level. Yet, the data obtained from my field research have revealed illustrative insights into pioneering endeavours trans people of this autonomous region in Spain have gained (and hopefully will continue to gain) who are in search of improving their everyday life. By looking at the individ-

ual lifeworlds, different thematic fields emerged, ranging from (self-) perception of the body, to the mode of sex/gender transition, its transfiguring impact on family and kin, as well as transformation processes on the societal, medical and legal levels.

The decade between my two field research periods turned out to be a timespan during which the role of medicine in the attribution and diagnosis of 'transsexuality' as a dysphoria was being increasingly scrutinised, simultaneously with the demand for the right of self-determination. That is, the right of trans persons to decide for themselves about their own sex/gender (without a psychologist's certificate), and the right to decide for themselves about (and obtain) the needed amount of sex/gender reassignment treatment to feel at ease with their body (and within society). This is a topic that has found its way into official global recommendations (e.g. the ICD11 of the World Health Organisation) and approved legislation at the local level (e.g. the *Ley Integral de Transexualidad*).

Additionally, this timespan experienced an increased information flow into society about trans topics, and started to address neglected target groups, such as the situation for trans minors. All these achievements (which promise a benefit for trans people) are confronted with the common sense notion among the general population about the 'nature' or 'divinity' of the binarity between men and women, that is, the 'natural or divine order' of the two sexes. This 'common sense notion' transforms at a slower pace than the legal achievements trans people have gained over the last few years. Furthermore, the transformation of the 'common sense notion' would require a willingness for reflection on the part of those holding this 'common sense notion'. It will be important to keep track of how the *Ley Integral de Transexualidad* will be implemented, of how it will affect the lifeworlds of the people concerned, and of how medicine and society in general will deal with it.